

ANGLER GUIDE

*Of recreation there is none
So free as fishing is alone;
All other pastimes do no less
Than mind and body both possess:
My hand alone my work can do,
So I can fish and study too.*

*I care not, I, to fish in seas,
Fresh rivers best my mind do please,
Whose sweet calm course I contemplate,
And seek in life to imitate:
In civil bounds I fain would keep,
And for my past offences weep.*

On the Trout by Izaak Walton, excerpt from The Compleat Angler



The Meramec River offers the adept and the novice angler both cold- and warm-water fishing opportunities. Three state record fish have been caught by the pole-and-line method from the Meramec River. The Missouri Department of Conservation booklet, Introduction to Fishing by Tom Cwynar, is a useful reference for anglers.

Warmwater game fish species most commonly sought are **smallmouth bass**, **largemouth bass**, and **rock bass**. Of the black bass populations, smallmouth bass make up about 60% of the population, largemouth bass about 25%, and spotted bass about 15%. In streams the statewide black bass regulation is a daily limit of six, in aggregate including smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, spotted bass, and all black bass hybrids; bass may not be taken from March 1 to the fourth Saturday in May. The stream statewide minimum size limit is 12-inch;

Of the black basses, **smallmouth bass** in some sections of the river are your best bet in terms of quantity

of fish over 12". Large-sized smallmouth prefer waters with current flowing over boulders, woody debris, or bedrock. Smallmouth prefer temperatures from 60 degrees F to no more than 80 degrees F. This species feeds optimally at 70-75 degrees F.

The Meramec River Smallmouth Bass Special Management Area includes 15 miles of stream from Scott's Ford Access, 9 miles southwest of Cuba, to the railroad bridge at Bird's Nest on the northern edge of Steelville. Float fishing this area is a favorite and often is the best travel method. Numerous canoe outfitters and 3 public stream accesses makes this area especially accessible. Ideal smallmouth bass habitat, numerous bluffs, boulder scour pools, and springs can be found in this stretch of river. The water temperature influences the catch and usually improves with cooling temperatures until mid-October, when temperatures drop rapidly. Within the Smallmouth Bass Special Management Area statewide regulations apply except, no more than one (1) of the six black bass taken can be a smallmouth bass with a 15-inch minimum size limit.

Tips

Food of larger smallmouth consists of crayfish, fish, and insect larvae. While live bait is often superior, imitations such as spinner bait or jigs and scented plastic grub combination work well. Also, crankbaits and plastic worms fished close to root wads and boulders are good producers.

Largemouth bass offer a lively alternative to the smallmouth. Preferring more woody habitats, sluggish weedy backwater areas, and slightly warmer waters, the largemouth bass can be caught on similar baits to the smallmouth.

The **rock bass**, regionally named goggle-eye, earns its name for its preference for rocky areas along streambanks having some current.

Tips

A good number of larger-sized (over 7") goggle-eye are available and can be found holding tight to cover, but less so at dusk in spring and early-summer. This panfish has good abundance upstream of Meramec State Park. Daily limit is 15 goggle-eye. Natural baits such as worms, grubs, maggots, small minnows and leeches are the most popular. Artificial baits such as jigs, flies, and small spinners come in a number of convenient forms and are effective as well.

Coldwater game fish species such as rainbow trout have been fished in the Meramec River watershed since the late 1800's. Rainbows feed on insects, crayfish, fish, and fish eggs, and enjoy a short feeding frenzy during aquatic insect hatches of stoneflies, mayflies, caddisflies, and other aquatic insects. Several fisherman use lures that mimic all stages of these aquatic insects.

The rainbow trout population at Blue Springs Creek Wild Trout Management Area was introduced in the 1880's and is now a naturally reproducing population. MDC regulations prohibit the use of synthetic eggs, live bait, and soft plastic lures, only flies and artificial lures may be used. In this 3.7-mile stretch, anglers

may harvest one trout daily, and trout must be 18 inches or greater in size to possess.

Rainbow and brown trout are found in the Meramec River Trout Special Management Area in Crawford and Phelps counties from Missouri Highway 8 Bridge to Scott's Ford. Brown trout are stocked once a year in the spring. Although there is limited natural reproduction of rainbows, most are escapees from Maramec Spring. Fisherman enjoy the big active browns (first introduced in 1966) or rainbows year round with daily possession limit of three 15" trout of any species.

Tips

Because synthetic eggs and soft plastic lures are specifically prohibited, watch for the emerging caddis fly or mayfly, while you wade fish. Work the shallower pools and surface waters in spring and early summer using dry flies and deeper pools in summer and early fall using subsurface artificial lures (see Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations for more information). Night fishing can be exciting because the bigger browns tend to be more active and less selective at night.

The trout park at Maramec Spring Park (573-265-7801) offers trout fishing for a small day pass fee. Natural and artificial lures as well as flies may be used throughout the park. Nearly year-round fishing (regular season is from March 1 through October 31, and catch and release season is from second Friday in November to the second Sunday in February) for stocked rainbow and brown trout (not regularly stocked) is good and especially good for larger trout in fall (see Trout Fishing Regulations for Maramec Spring Park for more information).

Other popular nongame fish species such as **river redhorse**, **shorthead redhorse**, **black redhorse**, **golden redhorse**, and **hog sucker**, to name a few, are often caught by grabbing, (or snagging), pole and line using bait, or by gigging. The Allenton area has some of the most numerous redhorse. Gigging has long been a local tradition in the Ozarks. This fishing method takes place at night with a long pole with forked tines, called a gig, for spearing fish. Traditionally giggers used shortleaf pine knots as a light within a wire basket that was positioned at the bow of a john boat, but today, the clear water of the Meramec River is illuminated by generator and high-intensity electric lighting. Nongame fish may be taken by the gig method in the Meramec River between sunrise and midnight from September 15 to January 31 with a daily limit of 20 fish in aggregate (See Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations, p. 23).

Tips

Sucker species are more often taken by gigging and snagging, but less dependent on clear water, pole-and-line methods have been successful using earthworm or the mussels (clams) as bait. After scaling, filleting, and scoring (cut-vertically through the flesh every 1/4 inch but not through the skin), deep-frying scored fillets rolled in cornmeal is probably the most common way to fix suckers.

The **longear sunfish** is less commonly sought but often is a by-catch pole-and-line species. **Longear sunfish** are an excellent panfish to fill your creel and provide fun for the youngsters.

Tips

Enjoy these fish using earthworms or larva mimics on jigs. They are in good abundance and can be found association with basses and other sunfish species. Longear can be taken throughout the year.

Channel catfish and **flathead catfish** are the sought-after catfishes in the Meramec River. While the channel catfish is more frequently caught, the large-sized flathead offers the angler a tasty meal. A tributary to the mighty Mississippi River, the lower Meramec River attracts some big catfish that are found in deep water of the main channel during the low water periods of July through September. At night these fish come into shallow sand bars to feed. Flathead catfish love big woody structure--downed logs, snags, root wads. These woody areas have been scoured by the current. Catfish food habits can be placed in three food groups: aquatic insects, terrestrial arthropods, and fish. Small-sized catfish feed heavily on insects. Fish and crayfish are not a consistent part of the diet until catfish reach 10 inches.

Tips

Catfish are sought with the pole-and-line method, but anglers have good luck with set lines, especially limb lines. Regulations require that you check lines daily and clearly label your set lines with your name and address. Whatever fishing method you use, effective channel catfish baits are usually those that have odor such a rubber worm dipped in stink bait. Other baits commonly used are chicken liver, crayfish, and bait shrimp. Gizzard shad pieces (oily fish) are effective in winter and summer. Unlike the channel catfish, flathead catfish prefer live bait. Use large minnows, goldfish, green sunfish, or bullheads. Set your limb lines in a main channel border. In the Meramec, catfish can be taken throughout the year. Daily limit is ten (10) channel catfish and five (5) flathead catfish with no length limit on either species.

Black crappie (hint: look for 7 or more dorsal fin spines) are a more dominant fish than **white crappie** (hint: look for up to 6 dorsal fin spines on a white crappie) in the lower Meramec River. Of course, that dominance can change with a good year class of either crappie species, which incidently, are cyclic in their populations. They can be caught readily in one year, and disappear the next. Best crappie fishing is in the spring, when crappie are preparing for the spawn and can be found in large schools. Also, some of the best crappie fishing is in the old gravel dredge lakes and floodplain lakes that remain connected to the river. White crappie migrate to the shallows when the water surface temperature (WST) reaches 65-70 degrees F. Black crappie start to move when WST reaches 55-60 degrees F. Black crappie like more quite and less turbid water and seek more vegetated areas than white crappie. Feeding habitats of both crappie species are the same. Both species feed on aquatic insects and crustaceans as juveniles and switch to fish as they grow.

Tips

Some anglers fish crappie at night throughout the summer using a flourescent light mount on a john boat. Because fish depth varies, find them by setting several rods at different depths. During summer, a light action pole, bobber, sinker, and small minnow work better than a lighthouse jig. Crappie can be taken in the Meramec River throughout the year. Daily limit is thirty (30) in the aggregate with no length limit on either species.

Paddlefish, commonly called spoonbill, inhabit the lower portions of the Meramec near its confluence with the Mississippi River. Season is from March 15 to April 30 and corresponds to the spawning season when fish move toward the flooded riffles and gravel bars. During spawning season paddlefish can be seen at the surface, thus common fishing methods are snagging and grabbing. The daily limit is two (2) fish. All paddlefish less than twenty-four inches (24") in body length, measured from the eye to the fork of the tail, must be returned to the water unharmed immediately after being caught.

Tips

Because paddlefish are filter-feeders, conventional methods of fishing are seldom successful. Use 50-75 pound test with a heavy sinker tied 2 feet below the treble hook. Many anglers use a loop around one of the tines to keep the shank of the hook parallel with the line. The gear is fished by casting from shore or trolling in a boat. The angler continuously jerks the treble hook, line, and sinker and then reels through large concentrations of schooling paddlefish. This schooling takes place in spring during spawning. The best snagging spots are old strip-pit lakes in the main channel or connected to the main channel in the lower 25 miles of the Meramec.

Walleye in Missouri are a prized game fish. In rivers, walleye can be found inhabiting the deep pools during the day and feeding at night in late evening in the shallow margins of the river. The eye structure of the walleye is effective in gathering the available light, hence the name "walleyed." Walleye has a daily limit of four (4) fish. The seasons is throughout the year, except that from February 20 through April 14 walleye may be taken and possessed only between 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Walleye may not be possessed on waters or banks thereof during closed seasons or closed hours. No walleye length limits are in effect for the Meramec River.

Tips

Most walleye fishermen prefer live minnows, leeches and nightcrawlers, but walleye can be taken by trolling in deepwater pools with a deep-running plugs, spoons, and fly-and-spinner combinations available in literally hundreds of styles, colors, and actions. Jigs account for most of the walleye caught by hopping or dragging along the bottom in deep water or by casting and retrieving in the shallows. Your spring fishing tactics should include fishing bridge abutments. They consist of rock piles and poured concrete and are spring-time walleye magnets. Secondly, most spring-time trolling in the lower Meramec River is done by slowly back-trolling jig and minnow combos around rock or bridge abutments or by flat lining large stick baits over runs and shoals.

Fishing Season and Limits

Fishing seasons, daily limits, and length limits are subject to annual review and occasional change to adjust regulations to fish populations and fisheries management objectives. Therefore, anglers are encouraged to obtain a current Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations available from permit vendors

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